

Don Oliver --- NBC - TV - Today Show - Phnom Penh

It was July of last year that the Cambodian government under pressure from the U.S. offered to unconditionally meet with the Communists here to try to negotiate an end to the fighting that has ravaged this country for five years. Since then, despite attempts to make contact, nothing has been heard from the Communist side, nothing but gunfire. The killing and the suffering drags on day after day. It is a strange war, the government trying to hold on to what it has, not making any real efforts to advance. The Communists always probing, staging terrorist attacks; but seemingly not having enough staying power to win the big victories. The government now controls only twenty percent of this country, but it has the cities and the commercial centers where most of the people are. The Communists have the country sides, the fragile economy of this little country has been shattered. In a nation of seven million people nearly two million are now said to be war refugees. The flood of refugees to the government controlled areas would indicate that people prefer the government side, but it is probably the lesser of two evils. The Communists are brutal, the government is corrupt. If American aid was withdrawn the government would probably have to surrender, those who favor continued U.S. aid say it would not be in the American tradition to allow that to happen. They say the situation here is far different than it was in Vietnam. Here the government is willing to negotiate and share control with the Communists if it can just find some Communists to negotiate with. Government supporters say that is a reasonable position, they say the U.S. should help this country feed and defend itself while looking for an early compromise settlement.